

Old chemicals, a new water filter, and lingering questions for residents of Blades

By **Tom Sherman** - February 14, 2018

At the Blades Volunteer Fire Hall last night, concerned residents gathered to hear updates from DNREC and Public Health officials about the contaminated drinking water in town. Most people expressed concerns the contaminated drinking water could cause health defects, like cancer. However, officials stressed the amount of chemicals in the water is very low.



Blades Mayor David Ruff, Jamie Mack (DPH), Shawn Garvin (DNREC) Keith Mensch (Office of Drinking Water) address concerned citizens

"Just so everyone knows, a part per trillion is something along the lines of a drop in a swimming pool," says Jamie Mack, acting Chief of DPH's Health Systems Protection. "If you look at most of the other contaminants and things we monitor for in drinking water, they're measured at levels a thousand times or a million times higher than that. So this is a very very low level of contamination that we're seeing."

He says the amount of perflourinated compounds, or PFCs, in the drinking water is extremely low, even though levels are above recommended EPA limits. Rather, Mack says the current

water distribution efforts began out of an abundance of caution to make sure residents are getting the cleanest water possible.

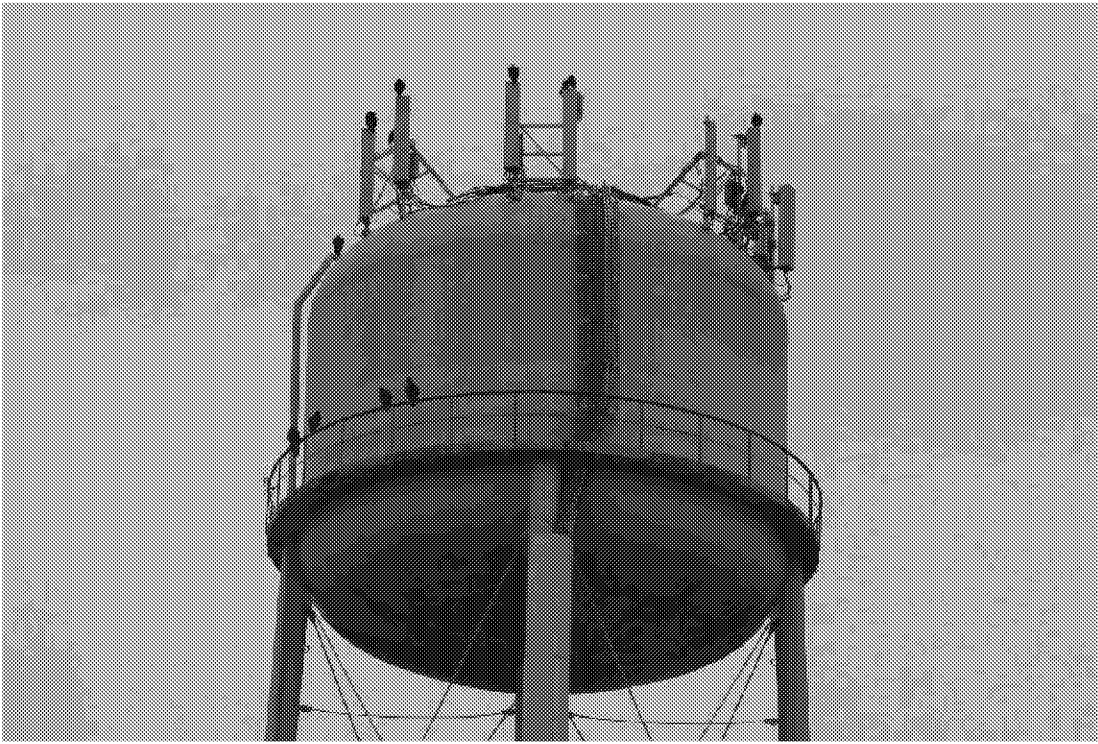


A new carbon filtration system is on its way to Blades from Pittsburgh. It will arrive later today, and crews have already been prepping the site at the town's water plant for installation. However, the system will need to be installed, cleaned, primed, flushed and then tested before coming on line.

"We really have to wait on the results from [the tests] before we can deem the water safe to drink, so it could be up 7 days to get the result from that point," says Keith Mensch, from DPH Office of Water. "So this could be a week to a week-and-a-half until we can consider the water safe to drink. So I just want to make sure those expectations are out there."



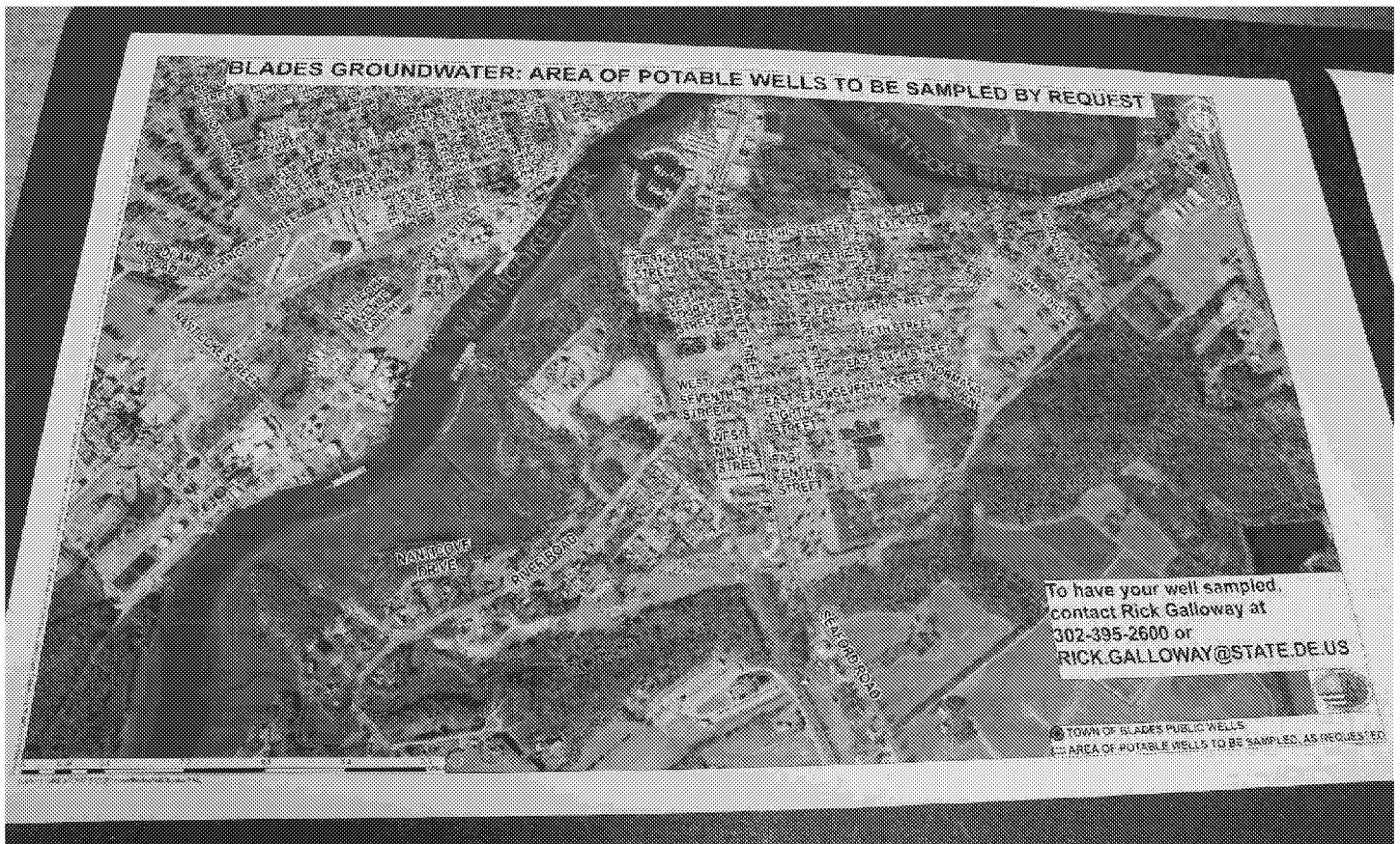
Concerned residents spent much of last night's public comment period peppering officials with questions about potential side effects from drinking the town's water. Many cited local children and pets getting cancer, wondering if it was directly related to the contamination. DPH officials downplayed any correlation between health issues and the chemical exposure.



Vultures gather on Blades' water tower

"These are very, very common chemicals. Most of us in the country have probably been exposed to them throughout our lives from Teflon pans, other non-stick surfaces and a variety of other sources," said Mack. "So the best thing we can do in this case is to end the exposure. And looking at blood tests and things like that it's not going to provide any information where we can say 'OK this much of your level came from this exposure.'"

Officials also stress people drawing water from private wells outside Blades Town limits but north of Morgan Creek should not drink their water until it's tested for PFCs as well. Anyone within a half-mile radius of Blades should get clean water from the National Guard instead.



DNREC believes contaminants in Blades' drinking water can be traced back to two industrial plating operations in town. However, DNREC Secretary Shawn Garvin stressed they cannot be 100% sure, until a thorough investigation is conducted.

"The two facilities– and I have to underscore that we have not done an investigation that definitively tracks back to any one entity– but what we do know is plating operations historically had used this chemical," says DNREC Secretary Shawn Garvin. "So Peninsula [Plating] and Procino [Plating] were the two facilities that kind of put this on the radar in the first place."

In 2013 owner operator of Procino Plating entered a guilty plea for illegally storing hazardous waste on South Market Street in Blades without a permit. DNREC has issued violations to Procino Plating dating as far back as 1994. Peninsula Plating abandoned operations in the 1990s, with EPA pollution reports from 1995 detailing emergency cleanup efforts, including removing numerous 55-gallon drums of toxic chemicals left behind.

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